



For thousands of years, people have been using rivers as a primary means of transportation. It was usually easier and safer to move things on a river than on a road. But many rivers were too shallow or too narrow for anything but a small boat.

One way of solving that problem was to build a series of dams. The rivers got deeper and wider but then you had the problem of a river with different levels --- similar to a set of steps.

The invention that dealt with the steps is called a lock. It's a mechanical system for raising or lowering a boat as it passes from one level of a river to another. Like an elevator it can take you up or down. The Chinese invented an early form of lock but the system that we use today was developed by the Dutch in 1373. It has a chamber with gates at both ends. A boat or boats go in, the gates are closed, and water is either pumped into the chamber to raise the boat or pumped out to lower the boat. When the water has reached the proper level, one of the gates is opened and the boat proceeds.

The first gates used in Europe worked like a guillotine. The gate was held in a frame and raised and lowered --- like a guillotine.

One day Leonardo da Vinci took a break from painting the Mona Lisa and invented a new and improved form of lock. The doors were in a V shape so the down stream pressure actually kept them closed. In 1478



he oversaw the construction of six of these new locks and they were fabulously successful. He was so excited that he raced home, put a smile on the Mona Lisa and celebrated with the Last Supper.

A great way to see how this lock system works is by taking a river cruise. Which is exactly what I did.

This trip is called Cruising the Netherlands and it sails through the Netherlands during the peak of the spring tulip season. We started in Amsterdam and made our way south to Middelburg and its Norbertine Abbey. Next we paid a visit to Keukenhof Gardens, the world's largest outdoor exhibition of flowers. We also stopped in Volendam, a major epicenter for tourist clutter. And Edam for its cheeses. And finally back to Amsterdam.



Sometime during the 1100s, a group of herring fishermen settled near here along the Amstel River. That community eventually became the city of Amsterdam. So I think it's only fair to say that from the very beginning, the story of Amsterdam has been the story of something good to eat.

But the real golden age of Amsterdam was the 1600s. Amsterdam was Europe's center for business as well as its cultural capital. It all started in 1595 when a Dutch trading ship landed in what was then called the East Indies, now Indonesia: Bali, Java, Borneo, Sumatra; lands which produced some of the world's most valuable spices.

Those were the places that Columbus had been looking for and when the Dutch got there

they took control of a spice trade to Europe that made many Dutchman wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. Actually, those dreams really weren't very wild at all, because even then the Dutch were very structured and not showy. Much of the wealth from that spice trade was used to build homes along the canals of Amsterdam.

Amsterdam was actually put together by connecting ninety islands with about five hundred bridges --- most citizens get around on bicycles. The town has only seven hundred and fifty thousand people but a million bikes. You could, if you wanted to, get from place to place just as well by boat.



The city plan for Amsterdam is based on three canals that form three semi-circles, one inside the other. Together they are described as the Canal Girdle. The outside canal in English is called the Prince's Canal. In the middle is the Emperor's Canal, and on the inside, the Gentleman's Canal. It's interesting that the most elegant and ambitious of the three is not those named with royal titles, it's the Gentlemen's Canal.

It's a reminder that for centuries the people of Amsterdam have loved the small businessman, the individual entrepreneur, and like most people, the owner of a small business tries to keep his taxes as low as he honestly can -- or at least to get the most for his money.

During the 1700's the people of Amsterdam paid their homeowner's tax based on the width of the front of their house. And that's why so many houses along the canals are so narrow. But these same houses go up and they go back, and as they go back they get wider. A pie-shaped house with the thinnest part facing the



street helped to cut down on your taxes and let you keep a bigger slice of your own economic pie. That's the

Trippenhuys, built in 1662. It's like a Venetian palace. Across the street is the narrowest house in Amsterdam. The story goes that the Tripp family coachman was expressing his wish for a home on the canal, even if it was only as wide as the door of his master's house. Mr. Tripp overheard him and built him just that: a house as wide as the Tripp front door.

The extraordinary architecture of Amsterdam is one of its great joys. The government has designated some seven thousand buildings in the old center as historically significant. The character of these streets tells the story of this city covering almost eight centuries. The people of Amsterdam have done a pretty good job of preserving their heritage and holding onto the old buildings was essential.

And they've built museums for just about everything Dutch that you can think of. They're also doing a good job of holding onto their gastronomic heritage. There are chefs all over this town who are researching old recipes, reproducing them and making the gastronomic past part of the present.

DePoort Restaurant, at the center of the town's oldest area, started as a brewery in 1592. It was the place where Heineken was first made. Today the restaurant offers some of the most traditional home foods of Holland: Dutch Pea Soup, a meal in itself with a piece of pork and slices of sausage; herring in various forms; Hotspot, which is a combination of mashed potatoes, sautéed onions and carrots. A giant Pancake served with apples and preserves. These are the real Dutch treats.

#### MIDDELBURG

The next morning we arrived in Middelburg. Originally, Middelburg was in the middle of an island which is why they called it Middelburg. But it was also in the middle of a lot of other things. During the Middle Ages it was the mid-point of a defensive stronghold that tried to hold back the Viking raiders.

During the middle of the 1100s a group of Norbertine monks emigrated to Middelburg from France and founded the Abbey of Our Lady which is now in the middle of the city.

And during the middle of the 1600s it was a mid-point for the operations of the Dutch East India Company. Being an executive with the Dutch East India Company was like being an



insider when Google went public---big bucks. And they spent a lot of their money building these beautiful houses along Middelburg's

canals.

We stopped into the weekly market, checked out the fruits and vegetables, and treated ourselves to some Stroopwafels.

Flour, sugar and butter are mixed together to make a dough. The dough is pressed out, cooked in a waffle iron, sliced in half and filled with thick sugar syrup. My kind of sandwich.

Did I ever mention how much I love my job?

#### THE DELTA WORKS

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1953, a perfect storm swept out of the North Sea and devastated 800 square miles along the southwest coast



of the Netherlands. Eighteen hundred and thirty-five people were killed. Clearly, the flood control system that had worked in the past was no longer sufficient.

The government's response was the Dutch Delta Works, a massive project that closed off three major rivers including the Rhine and created a series of tide-free fresh water lakes. There are four great barriers and six secondary dams that run for over 18 miles.

#### MARCEL HANSE

Dutch Delta Works

*We are here on the artificial island called The Neeltje Jans. And this barrier here is only a part of the whole Delta Project. Normally the 62 gates in this storm barrier are open to let the tides flow in and out. Only when there is a dangerous water level expected, which can happen during a North Western Storm Period like it was in 1953. Then we close the steel gates of this barrier and keep the water on the seaside to prevent the water level inside in the sea arm from becoming dangerous. And that danger level is 3 meters above normal Amsterdam level. Since the opening here in 1986, that has been necessary 24 times.*

## WHERE TO EAT



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#### ROTTERDAM

The next day we arrived in Rotterdam. During the 1200s, a small river known as The Rotte was dammed and



henceforth the area was known as Rotterdam. Its location at the meeting point of two rivers --- one that flows into Germany and one that flows into France made it a perfect spot for a harbor.

During the 1600s, Rotterdam was a center of culture and trade filled with people, money and ideas. Unfortunately, much of Rotterdam was devastated during World War II, but you can still find remnants of Rotterdam's glorious past in the Delft Harbor area.

This was also the day we visited Keukenhof Gardens.

In 1949 the mayor of a small town began working on a plan for an open-air flower exhibition where growers could showcase their latest hybrids and customers could buy bulbs for the flowers they liked. Today, Keukenhof's spring exhibition is the largest flower exhibition in the world. There are over 70 acres, with over 7 million flowers.

#### BARRY VON EEDEN

Keukenhof Gardens

*"Gogof" means kitchen garden in English and it's from the 7<sup>th</sup> Century when there was a castle*

over there and the vegetables were grown over here. We've got a lot of varieties because we are open two months so we actually get flowers blooming in the beginning of March to the end of May. As visitors walk through the park they also see 50 sculptures, we've got 4 pavilions, we've got a lot of flower expositions in the pavilions like orchids, tulips, lilies, roses. What's special about tulips is that this is the beginning of spring and it stands for life. You plant in the ground and they bloom and shine in all its colors. You will see a lot of colors of tulips. The oldest ones are yellow and red, but these days we've got a lot of flowers with almost black. We say it's a black tulip, but it's deep purple. Every flower combination that you can think of you can find it over here.

Most of the flowers are marked with a name and the grower. If you see something you like you can order it from the growers and it will be shipped to your home in early October.



#### TULIP MANIA

In the middle of the 1500s, tulips were brought to Europe from Turkey. Their unusual and intense colors and delicate shapes made them a popular but costly item. There was a growing interest in the most unusual varieties and the demand soon exceeded the supply---prices began to rise, particularly in the Netherlands.

By the early 1600s a single bulb of a new variety was considered sufficient for a bride's dowry. A successful brewery in France was exchanged for a single bulb.

Most of the business was conducted among professionals in the tulip trade, but in 1633 the general public joined in and things got crazy. Middle class and poor people began mortgaging their homes, their businesses, and selling their comic book collections to buy tulips. Sales and re-sales took place while the bulbs were still in the ground.

The crash came in the first week of 1637. People began to worry. Would prices continue to rise? Was this the best time to get out? Within days it was over --- tulips were no longer an investment, they had returned to their previous state of just

being flowers and thousands of people faced economic ruin.

No one has ever been able to fully explain what happened. Tulips were certainly rare and beautiful. Amsterdam was filled with people who were newly rich and looking for status symbols. But families who should never have considered playing in the market jumped in and they were destroyed. It seems that the more things change the more they are the same.

#### EDAM & VOLENDAM

Our next stop was Edam which is famous for its cheese. During the 1500s, Edam was granted the right to operate a cheese weighing house which



was a big deal. Farmers would bring in their cheeses and get an official weight then offer them for sale. The purchasers felt secure that they were actually getting what they were paying for and of course the city got a piece of the action.

Edam cheese comes in the shape of a ball. When it's exported it's usually covered with a red wax seal. If you see one covered with black wax it means that it's been aged for more than 17 weeks. If you see one covered in green it's been mixed with herbs. If you see one covered in psychedelic stripes, you've spent too much time in Amsterdam.

Onboard we sampled Edam...and Gouda...and other regional cheeses at a Dutch Cheese Tasting.

We also visited Volendam, a small fishing village with a big tourist draw.

Originally, the land that I am walking on was under water --- it was part of the harbor of the nearby town of Edam. But in the 1300s they drained the area and farmers and fisherman moved in. You ended up with a town called 'Volendam' which means 'filled dam'.

#### AMSTERDAM

The last day of our cruise was spent in Amsterdam and we started it with a canal tour of the city.

The houses built on the canals have been the most fashionable homes in the city for hundreds of years but recently the house boats anchored in front of those homes have become almost as

valuable.

Just outside of Amsterdam is the Zaanse Schans Historic Village.

SASKIA van de STADT

Zaanse Schans Historic Village

*An architect has made a design of a little village. How it should look like in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. So what you see here are the houses, warehouses, and windmills of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.*

*All the houses are inhabited and you can rent the houses from our association. The windmills are working, but only for tourist purposes.*

*I grew up here. It was wonderful to live here, surrounded by real Dutch houses, with water. And ice skating in the winter times. In summer time we had a garden full of tulips.*



Zaanse Schans Historic Village was created during the 1960s and 70s in order to preserve examples of traditional Dutch life and architecture. Some of the buildings date back over 400 years and include eight working windmills --- each illustrating what the wind power was used for. A saw mill. A mill

where peanuts and linseeds were crushed and their oil extracted. And a paint mill where pigments were ground into paint. The village also has a number of old-fashioned shops where traditional crafts are demonstrated.

Amsterdam is filled with interesting architecture including a series of structures dedicated to what became known as The Amsterdam School. In 1910, three architects decided to develop a new style of architecture. They believed that buildings should be filled with fantasy that forms should be flowing and organic and there should be lots of decoration. They built structural frames in concrete and covered them with brick, but the bricks were laid in unlikely patterns and shapes with rounded edges, unusual angles and tapered towers that led nowhere. Little thought was given to whether the shapes were practical or if limited funds should be spent on unusable towers. By the 1930s, more conservative thinking prevailed and the movement was over. But anyone interested in architecture should take a look at

the Amsterdam School buildings that are still standing.

ALICE ROEGHOLT

Historian

*The architects of the Amsterdam school became famous because they built lots of social housing blocks.*

*And what is very beautiful is this layered decoration. The brick makes beautiful shadows. Staggered bricks create different shadows for every moment of the day.*

*And just imagine in the 20<sup>s</sup> when people came from the town to this new neighborhood they came up through this street and saw this building. And what did they see? Did they see a village? Or did they see a castle? There are all these towers. But in all the literature it was mentioned as "the ship", because the average worker never saw a castle in his life. So the socialists saw a rebuilding of castles for the worker, but the people saw what looked more like a ship. As you can see when you look to the first round tower, which is the main entrance to the museum, it looks like the funnel of a steam ship.*



That evening, back onboard, we celebrated the conclusion of the cruise at the Captain's Dinner.

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